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AGIR POUR TIMOR

REPORT ON THE CGI DEMONSTRATIONS, 16 JULY 1992

Two demonstrations were held in Paris on July 16, at the occasion of the CGI meeting of July 16 and 17. The first one took place in the morning, avenue Kleber, in front of the Conference centre where the meeting was taking place. The second one, in the afternoon, started near the Indonesian embassy, marched to the nearby Human Rights square of the Trocadero and continued until midnight as a wake, animated by various cultural groups.

1. Staging

a) The morning demonstration comprised some 150 people carrying banners and posters. The large attendance was thanks to the Timorese, Indonesian, Moluccan and Dutch participants who had arrived some days earlier. Demonstrators were not allowed to get near the building itself, but journalists crossed the street to come talk to them. Especially Indonesian journalists were keen to interview Indonesian participants. British and Dutch journalists were also present, as well as a rather suspicious-looking RFO camera team (the cameraman was an Indonesian!).

Posters prepared by participants from Holland, saying (in French) "Indonesia tortures Timor - stop aid - Paris 16-17 July - CGI gives FF 24,462,500,000 to the dictatorial regime of Indonesia" had been stuck nearby earlier. Other banners included "Ganyang Suharto", "Fight for Democracy and Human Rights", "Agir pour Timor", "ABRI harus angkut kaki dari Timor-Timur!", "Timor = Koweit", "No aid for Genocide in East Timor" (signed Free East Timor Japan Coalition), paintings by an Indonesian artist, some caricatures and a bloody flag.

The police attendance was 30 or 40.

b) The afternoon demonstration grouped between 200 and 250 people. It had been planned to start in front of the Indonesian embassy but the police prevented it. 3 anti-riot police vans were on the spot, but no incidents took place. The embassy filmed and photographed the demonstration throughout (apparently nobody thought of preventing them: according to French law it is illegal to film or take a photo of someone without his/her consent).

There was a confusion initiated by a police officer who reported that the Ambassador might agree to receive a petition. After some consultation it was decided that it was worth the effort, and two demonstrators (Antonio Dias and Donaciano Gomes) went to the embassy. But they were requested to sign in as any visitor, leaving their names and

addresses and saying who they wanted to see! All that time they were dutifully filmed by an employee of the Embassy. Finally they left, leaving the petitions to the staff on duty.

After this, the cortege, headed by coffin bearers, started moving towards the Trocadero Human rights square, where it settled until midnight. 50 wooden crosses and the morning posters were displayed. Yayak, an Indonesian who had drawn a controversial calendar in Java last year, had come from Germany and painted on the spot a huge canvas with the help of some other people. Indonesian and Timorese musical groups performed, later joined by a group of French Portuguese rappers!

c) The next day, a concert was staged at the House of Portugal by the Timorese group Lifau; about 100 persons attended.

2. Organisation

- A support meeting 3 weeks before the demonstrations (see #3).

- A press conference one week before (see #4).

- The Aubervilliers township kindly lent a gymnasium (with shower facilities) to house foreign participants.

- 100,000 tracts calling for the demonstration were printed and distributed in the days prior to it. Most of them (80,000) were distributed on markets, near churches... in Paris and the suburbs, the preceding week-end.

3. Attendance and support

People came from various European countries for the demonstrations: many (40?) from Holland, including Dutch, Indonesians and Moluccans. (A first group of Moluccans arrived the 15th and participated both demos. A second group arrived unexpectedly on the 16th, in the middle of the morning, and left almost immediately without any participation, apparently because they had only a 24h visa and had rented their coach only for 24h.) From Lisbon came a coach of Timorese (but no Portuguese), from Porto and Braga came 17 Portuguese and 2 Timorese. Other people came from Belgium (1), Switzerland (1, Timorese), Germany (2, including Yayak) and the United States (3). Apparently nobody came from other countries.

On the French side support was, to say the least, scant. Most of the French participants were really Portuguese living in France. Agir pour Timor and FDI had previously sought support from various French NGOs. A few responded and even fewer sent

anybody. Three weeks before the demonstrations, we had invited about 60 NGOs, trade unions, political parties... to a meeting to discuss their support and organisation. None attended!

Support eventually came from: The Greens (one of the two Ecology parties), MRG (a small centre-left party), PCF (the communist party), Alternative Rouge et Verte (a combination of green-leftists), CGT (a trade-union linked to PCF), and CNID. Those who actually sent someone were CGT, PCF, CNID. MRAP, an anti-racist movement close to the communists, was represented by Michel Robert, also president of ASTO, the other French East Timor solidarity group. (ASTO itself did not participate.) Individual members of other organisations, like Agir Ici, ACAT and Amnesty International, also came in their own names. One trade-union, CFDT, actually refused to support the demonstrations!

The ruling Socialist party, although it had organised a hearing with us on East Timor in June (see earlier posting), failed to support the protests. During this meeting it had been announced that the party would ask publicly for a postponement of the delivery of French aid (ibid.), but we did not see any such communique published.

4. Media coverage

Surprisingly for demonstrations of this size, the media coverage, at least in France, was close to nil. Reportedly L'Humanite (communist) did something but we didn't see it. Le Monde published an article on the outcome of the summit, but apparently failed to notice any protests. Liberation dealt with the summit in a paragraph. No other dailies seem to have considered the topic.

A week earlier we had organised a press conference on the meeting. It could be more appropriately called "conference without press": no journalists were present, except for the two Portuguese local radios of Paris.

Those two radios were the only French media to cover the event - and they did a superb job, following the demonstrations, carrying interviews live... they can be thanked for having brought to the wake extra groups of Portuguese, who arrived unexpectedly around 10.30/11 pm.

5. Meetings with officials

Prior to the demonstrations, we had 2 meetings (3 counting the Socialist party hearing) with French 'officials': one with a senior diplomat fom the Quai d'Orsay, and one with the head of the French delegation in CGI.

a) The Quai d'Orsay diplomat told us very clearly that foreign aid would not be linked

to human rights record, but he added that the question of human rights would be raised during the conference. Reportedly this was done... by the US! True, the diplomat did not say France itself would raise the matter, but this is certainly what he led us to expect. It is not clear to us if France raised the issue privately (a favourite stance of the French diplomacy in some occasions) since its visit to Indonesia at the end of June.

To our request that France use its influence to have Amos Wako's UN report made public, he answered that it was out of the question. It had already been difficult enough to have this visit take place at all, and it was under the condition that the report would not be made public.

b) The head of the French delegation explained that the Quai d'Orsay took political decisions but that he was only an economist who makes no politics. As a citizen and a Christian, he was concerned. But France would continue its aid normally. Just as the Quai d'Orsay diplomat, he explained that this money goes to the Indonesian people and that Indonesian corruption is not as bad as, say, African corruption, because it is invested in Indonesia itself! French aid is once again the second in volume among donor countries, after Japan and before the US.

6. Conclusion

Logistically preparation and handling of the demonstrations was a big strain for us. All was done by 4 or 5 people altogether. It was particularly disappointing to convene a meeting and a press conference with no attendance at all. Even many members of our own group didn't show up or participate in any way, while their help would have been sorely needed. The bad response from the media was also a bad surprise.

One reason for this was probably the bad timing of the demonstrations (the CGI's fault!), which took place in the holidays period, just after the 14th of July (Bastille day). But another, deeper reason is probably that interest and support for freedom struggles in East Timor and Indonesia are still very weak in France, and very difficult to get.

Still the outcome of these demonstrations should probably be seen as positive. There are not so many demonstrations of this size in favour of East Timor or Indonesian rights, outside East Timor and Indonesia. I was not present on the 16th of July, but reportedly the demonstrations went smoothly and were a success, thanks in part to the excellent organisation on the Dutch and Indonesian sides. If the impact of unreported demonstrations is not clear, these show that at least they can be done well. The experience gained this time could be useful for future events of this kind... next year?

Bruno (in absentia)